



RESEARCH GRANTS PROGRAM

INFORMATION AND INSTRUCTIONS

for research into macular disease

commencing in 2023

Applications open:	13th October 2022
Applications close:	31st January 2023 5pm AEDT
Grant recipients announced:	May 2023

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SECTION A: INFORMATION

BACKGROUND

Macular Disease Foundation Australia (MDFA), a registered charity, is the only organisation in Australia specifically devoted to supporting and representing people with macular disease. MDFA's mission is to reduce the incidence and impact of macular disease in Australia through four pillars of work:

- Prevention and early detection
- Support for people living with macular disease
- Advocacy
- Research.

Thanks to the generous support of the macular disease community from donations and bequests, MDFA is again offering grants for researchers with expertise in macular disease to commence major projects in 2023.

The 2023 Macular Disease Foundation Australia Research Grant ("the MDFA grant") will be offered to conduct **research related to macular disease**.

For the MDFA grant, the Primary Investigator and their Research Institute must be based in Australia. Collaboration with other institutions (including those from overseas) is permissible, but overseas institutions are not eligible to draw funds from the grant. Grant payments will be made to the institution of the Primary Investigator (the 'administering institution').

AMOUNT OF FUNDING

Applicants may apply for grants up to the value of A\$200,000 plus GST to support projects of 1 to 3 years in duration. Based on the merits of submitted applications, MDFA may choose to award multiple research grants. MDFA reserves the right to award grants of lower value than requested by the applicant pending revision of the research proposal and budget.

The grant is an agreement between MDFA and the administering institution that specifies financial support for specific researchers to undertake a defined research project.

The 2023 grant funding commitment may be drawn down on a basis to be agreed between MDFA and the administering institution and will be contingent upon the applicant meeting certain agreed research deliverables.

AREAS OF RESEARCH

MDFA recognises there is a critical need for macular disease research with the fundamental goal of reducing the burden of care on people living with macular disease and the health system. MDFA is seeking to fund high quality, high impact research within the following broad areas:

Bio-medical: e.g. genetics, risk factors, treatment outcomes, early intervention and prevention, pathogenesis, epigenetics.

Low vision: e.g. incidence/prevalence data, accessibility and affordability of services and support, referral pathways, daily living, independence and psychological wellbeing, national guidelines and accreditation for the delivery of low vision services in Australia, evaluating and supporting early referral services and adherence/compliance with rehabilitation.

Nutrition, supplements and/or lifestyle: e.g. risk reduction, preventing or attenuating disease progression, impact of diet, supplements and lifestyle interventions, utilisation and adherence to diet or lifestyle recommendations, epigenetics.

Practices and protocols: e.g. best practice for eye health professionals, referral pathways, models of care, optimising communication with people with macular disease, their family and carers.

All eligible research grant applications in the area of macular disease are welcome and will be considered by the Grant Review Panel based on merit.

For 2023 grant applications, the Grant Review Panel will be especially interested to consider research that seeks to better understand:

- Dementia, vision loss and optimal patient care in the aged care system
- Barriers to accessing screening, diagnosis, and treatment services for people with macular disease
- Drivers of poor adherence and treatment cessation for macular disease.

ELIGIBILITY

Researchers working in any field of research relevant to macular disease are eligible to apply for an MDFA research grant, provided they meet the following criteria:

- The Primary Investigator:
 - must be based in Australia at an Australian institution. Co-Investigators may be based in overseas institutions but are not eligible to draw funds from the grant
 - must be an Australian citizen or Australian permanent resident at the time of submission. Research cannot begin until evidence of citizenship or permanent residency has been provided to MDFA.
- Funding cannot commence until all relevant ethical and other approvals have been obtained and evidence provided to MDFA. If these approvals have not been obtained by 31 January 2024, MDFA reserves the right to withdraw the offer of funding.
- The successful applicant must commence the research no later than 31 January 2024.
- Research applicants can only be named as an investigator on a single application for an MDFA Research Grant or Grant Family Fund grant, but not both. Research institutions may submit more than one application.
- The administering institution must be registered as an Administering Institution with the NHMRC and/or the ARC.
- The application must be complete and adhere to all eligibility criteria, instructions and guidelines including word limits and formatting. If applicants are unsure of any requirements, they should contact MDFA for clarification **prior to** submitting their application.
- If the applicant (or members of the investigator team) is in receipt of research grant funding from other sources or intends to submit grant applications to other funding entities for the same or similar research, this must be disclosed to MDFA at the time of application. In the event funding is secured from another source, MDFA reserves the right to withdraw funding for the research.
- **The administering institution accepts responsibility for indirect costs of the research and for grant administration. MDFA will not fund indirect research costs, institutional overheads or any institutional administrative charges.**
- Applicants must be willing to enter into the Research Funding Agreement, a reference copy of which can be obtained by contacting research@mdfoundation.com.au.
- Half-yearly progress reports must be completed by the Primary Investigator upon commencement of funding. The final report will be due two months after

the project concludes. A report pro forma, provided by MDFA, should be used for the written report. MDFA reserves the right to withhold funding if progress reports are not received by the due date or if progress or research activities deviate significantly from those set out in the funding agreement.

- At six monthly intervals, the Primary Investigator may be asked to present (either in person or via teleconference) to representatives of MDFA, the MDFA Research Committee, and/or the MDFA community.
- Grant recipients must advise MDFA in advance of any public dissemination of the research, including publications and conference presentations, or in any other form or medium. Any presentations and publications must disclose the research grant funding provided by MDFA in accordance with ethical publication practices.
- MDFA reserves the right to withhold all or part of the grant (as described in the funding contract).
- All attachments listed in this document are to be submitted along with the completed application form.
- MDFA may, from time to time and where appropriate, request the grant recipient assist with publicity, advocacy or to provide other assistance at special events. The recipient should make all reasonable efforts to assist.
- The grant recipient must comply with the regulations and requirements of their host institution in relation to leave entitlements, work arrangements, discipline, supervision, equipment, security or other work-related matters. It is not the responsibility of MDFA to provide materials, equipment, supervision, overhead recovery, or any other resources needed to conduct the research.
- The research must conform to relevant standards of ethics, safety and privacy.

Applicants must provide evidence of adherence to these standards when requested to do so by the MDFA.

REVIEW PROCESS

MDFA Research Grant applications will be subject to scientific peer review by suitably qualified reviewers who are independent of MDFA. Applications will also be assessed by members of the macular disease community including people with macular disease, their family members, carers and others with lived experience of vision loss.

Final approval of MDFA Research Grant funding rests with the MDFA Board upon recommendation by MDFA's Research Committee.

Assessment Criteria – Scientific Peer Review

✓ **Scientific quality of the research proposal (60% weighting)**

- The clarity and strength of the research hypotheses, research questions, aims and objectives.
- The strengths and weaknesses of the project's design.
- The clarity and feasibility of the research plan.

✓ **Significance of proposed research (10% weighting)**

- Potential impact on MDFA's objectives of reducing the incidence and impact of macular disease.
- Potential to increase knowledge about macular disease.
- Potential to be extended into further research of significance.
- Alignment with the research priority areas identified by the MDFA.

✓ **Innovation of proposed research (10% weighting)**

- The extent to which the proposed work uses an innovative research approach.

✓ **Applicant's track record, relative to opportunity (20% weighting)**

- Evidence that the investigator/s have the skills and experience to achieve the aims of the research.
- Record of achievement.
- Contribution to their research field.

Additional contributions to the project (financial and in-kind) from the administering institution or other sources will be favourably regarded.

Assessment Criteria – Community Review

✓ Magnitude of the problem (25% weighting)

- On any of the following aspects: disease causation; risk; early detection and prevention; diagnosis; treatment; physical and/or mental and/or social wellbeing; quality of life; or impact on morbidity:
 - Describe the magnitude and significance of the problem (e.g. incidence, consequences, impact on people with macular disease, family, carers, community) to be addressed by the research

✓ The extent of the benefit (25% weighting)

- Explain how the findings of the research would benefit those with macular disease.

✓ Pathway for realising the benefit (25% weighting)

- The steps required to reach the stated end benefits of the research. The steps should include those in the current proposal and – if necessary – beyond, including timeframes for each step.

✓ Potential for application of the findings (25% weighting)

- How the research will be applied in the real world over the short-, medium- and/or long-term, including anticipation of the barriers that need to be addressed and how the researcher proposes to address them.

HOW TO APPLY

Applicants are encouraged to contact MDFA prior to submission of an application to seek clarification of any questions relating to the application process.

- Applicants must use the current application forms available at <http://www.mdfoundation.com.au>.

The application form must be completed in accordance with the instructions provided in Section B of this document. Applicants must adhere to the specified formatting guidelines as well as word and page limits.

- Applications open on 13th October 2022 and close at 5pm (AEDT) on 31st January 2023. Applications must be submitted electronically via email to **research@mdfoundation.com.au**.

Electronic files should be named with the lead applicant's last name, followed by their first name and the year of application (e.g. Smith_John_MDFA_application_2023).

All attachments, except for Attachment E, should be included along with the completed application form in a single file.

Attachment E ('nomination of possible assessors form') (see Section B Part 6 of this document) should be saved as separate files using the same file naming convention and included in the same email as the remainder of the application.

The total file size of the application and attachments should not exceed 5MB.

- Once submitted electronically, the application will be considered final and no changes will be accepted.
- Late applications will not be accepted.
- MDFA reserves the right to reject incomplete applications.
- MDFA will email an acknowledgment of receipt of application within two working days. If acknowledgement of receipt is not received within five working days, the applicant should contact MDFA.
- Successful applicants will be contacted directly and also announced on the MDFA website in May 2023. Decisions of the MDFA Board are final and will not be subject to appeal.

Unsuccessful applicants will be notified in writing via email. Please note that unsuccessful applicants will not receive feedback from the peer review process, grant review panel assessment, MDFA Research Committee or MDFA Board.

- Successful applicants may be contacted for an interview.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information, please contact:

Research Grants Program

Macular Disease Foundation Australia

Ph: (02) 9261 8900

Email: research@mdfoundation.com.au

SECTION B: INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETING THE APPLICATION FORM

PART 1: APPLICANT AND INSTITUTION INFORMATION

This part requests information on current and former appointments for the primary investigator and co-investigators, and details of the proposed host Institution. If the proposed host Institution is not registered as an Administering Institution with the NHMRC and/or the ARC, please contact MDFA to discuss eligibility.

Evidence of Australian Citizenship or Permanent Residency: The primary investigator must be an Australian citizen or permanent resident at the time of the grant application. Evidence to support residency status must be provided on request and will be required from successful candidates prior to any offer of funding.

Research Environment: The applicant is to describe the host Institution's research environment, and how it will support their research. A description of the facilities available for the project should be included. Address how the research environment will improve the applicant's capacity to conduct macular disease-related research.

PART 2: APPLICANT'S CAPACITY TO CONDUCT THE RESEARCH

In reverse chronological order the applicant shall list peer-reviewed publications, patents and commercialisation activity (if appropriate) for the primary investigator and up to two co-investigators since 2017. For the list of grants, ensure that full details are provided, including years and amounts awarded.

This part also asks about the applicant's contribution to the field, and contributions to people with macular disease.

Provide details of any career interruptions that may have affected the primary investigator's track record. The MDFA appraises track records in light of opportunity, broadly in accordance with the principles of the NHMRC.

PART 3: PROJECT DETAILS

This section includes the project title and project summaries.

Copies of human, animal or bio-safety ethics clearances should be attached, if available (Attachment B). Funds will be released to the successful administering Institution when copies of appropriate ethics approvals have been provided to MDFA.

Any actual or potential conflict of interest that the applicant may have in relation to this research must be disclosed in the application. For example, declaration of any support received from, or being sought from, any commercial industry that may benefit from this work, or from any of their agencies or subsidiaries.

PART 4: RESEARCH PLAN

Include a research plan of no more than eight pages by inserting text into the appropriate boxes in the Microsoft Word application form, in regular 12-point Arial or Helvetica.

References are to be included within the eight pages and can be in 10-point font.

Applications with Research Plans exceeding eight pages will be rejected.

Project Title

Insert the title of the project.

Aims and Background

Provide a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the proposed research, research question and/or hypotheses to be tested. Provide the context and background to the proposed research project. Indicate how the primary research subject and approach fit with existing knowledge and other research currently being undertaken.

Milestones

Milestones for the research should be identified with dates so that progress of the project can be measured. Presentation in the form of a table or Gantt chart is preferred.

Approach

Referring to milestones, please describe the approach to the research, including its design, sampling, techniques, protocols, data analysis procedures (including statistical tests and power calculations, if appropriate). Also describe the procedural checks/auditing that will be used to ensure compliance with the study protocol.

Outcomes and Significance

Describe the ways in which the proposed research is innovative and/or significant. Describe the expected outcomes of the research, including expected outcomes for people with macular disease. Is the project likely to lead to the development of patents and/or the commercialisation of any technology? How will the results of the research be disseminated?

Alignment of Research with MDFA Priorities

The Macular Disease Foundation Australia aims to reduce the incidence and impact of macular disease in Australia. Describe how the proposed research project aligns with these priorities.

See <https://www.mdfoundation.com.au/about-mdfa/our-work/strategic-priorities/>

References

References are included within the page count (eight pages). References can be in 10-point font.

PART 5: COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE

Include a community perspective of approximately two pages by inserting text into the appropriate boxes in the Microsoft Word application form, in regular 12-point Arial or Helvetica.

Responses to the Community Perspective criteria must be written in lay language, in a manner which can be read without reference to information submitted in the rest of the application.

This ensures the Community Review Form can be understood by a non-researcher, can be read as a stand-alone document, and it is anonymous to eliminate potential conflicts of interest.

Project Title

Insert the title of the project.

Plain Language Summary

This reflects the Project Summary from Part 3. The plain language summary should be appropriate for the lay community and/or the media, using language appropriate for non-experts.

Magnitude of the Problem

Provide a clear statement of the magnitude of the problem (e.g. incidence, consequences, impact on people with macular disease, their family, carers, community) to be addressed by the research.

The Extent of the Benefits of This Research

Explain how findings of the research would benefit people with macular disease.

Pathway for Realizing the Benefits of This Research

Provide a clear statement of the steps that will be required to reach the stated end benefits of the research. The steps should include those in the current proposal and – if necessary – beyond, including anticipated timeframes for each step.

Potential for Application of This Research

Provide a clear statement of how the research will be applied in the real world over the short-, medium- and/or long-term, including anticipation of the barriers that need to be addressed and how the researcher proposes to address them

PART 6: BUDGET AND BUDGET JUSTIFICATION

Budget

Provide a budget for each year of the project (up to three years in total).

For this application, the budget does not form part of the research plan; hence it is not included in the eight-page limit.

Research funds provided by MDFA shall be expended within Australia, unless otherwise approved (in exceptional circumstances) in writing by MDFA.

The combined cash and in-kind contribution to the project from the administering Institution must be included.

The Grant is exclusive of GST. In the budget table, show the cost of individual items excluding GST. Include GST in the final row of the table as indicated.

Only include items that are essential to the proposed project.

MDFA will not fund indirect research costs, institutional overheads, institutional infrastructure or any institutional administrative charges.

Cash contributions from the Institution are those that are incurred directly to contribute to the proposed project.

In-kind contributions are made without the direct expenditure of cash on the project; they include goods, services, materials or time. Examples include time for existing staff and access to laboratories and other facilities.

Ensure that all figures are calculated accurately.

Use the headings provided in the budget tables in the application form. Add or delete rows as required.

Provide a detailed project budget, covering:

- Personnel: (for each personnel request, include details of employment level, hourly rate/salary and percentage of time on project).

- Consumables: itemise consumables into categories such as laboratory reagents, antibodies, postage, printing, survey production costs, software etc.
- Equipment: list equipment that is unique to the proposed research project and is essential for the project to succeed. The grant will not fund the purchase of computers unless they are of a specialised nature required for the operation of laboratory equipment.
- Travel: (specify whether for data collection, collaboration and/or dissemination). Please note that travel costs are funded only in exceptional circumstances and when required as part of the project activities.
- Other research costs including research materials.

Budget justification

The budget justification should not exceed one page. Please indicate why a budget item is necessary and what it costs. For travel budget items, explain the necessity for, and timing of, travel, as well as the location.

Other information about budget

Provide details of any other funding sources that have been or are currently being pursued for this or a similar project. If this project or a similar project has any additional source of funding, explain how it will relate to this Grant. Duplicate funding for research is not permissible and MDFA reserves the right to withdraw funding in the event that other funding is secured for the research.

Provide details of procedures to ensure financial accountability.

ATTACHMENTS CHECKLIST

Attachment	Requirement	Filename
Attachment A	Coversheet	MDFA Grant 2023 Attachment A (Coversheet).doc to be downloaded from MDFA's website. Please attach to the FRONT of your application.
Attachment B	Ethics clearances	(Provided by applicant) Please attach copies of human, animal or bio-safety ethics clearances, if available.
Attachment C	Host institution letter	(Provided by applicant) A letter from the proposed host Institution is required to confirm that the institutional support described in this application will be provided if the Grant is awarded.
Attachment D	Certifications	Please ensure that all relevant signatures have been obtained, as required in the Certification form. MDFA Grant 2023 Attachment D (Certifications).doc

Attachment	Requirement	Filename
Attachment E	Nomination of possible assessors & 'request not to assess' form	<p>This information will be removed from the application before it is given to assessors.</p> <p>MDFA Grant 2023 Attachment E (Nomination of Possible Assessors Form).doc</p> <p>At least two potential assessors for the application should be nominated. These assessors will not necessarily be asked to assess the application. Possible assessors must not have a conflict of interest with the Grant applicant or the proposed research. Possible conflicts of interest include collaborations (past or current), working in the same institution and having a close personal relationship.</p> <p>Requests to exclude individuals as potential assessors can also be made on this form. Possible reasons for requesting that an individual not assess the application include: concern that the person may be unreasonably biased, personal conflict or hostility, they are a direct competitor or have a potential conflict of interest.</p> <p>Information about nominated assessors and requests not to assess will be removed from the application before it is given to external assessors, and only individuals involved in the selection of assessors will be made aware of these requests. Confidentiality will be maintained.</p> <p>Finally, sign the consent to share your application with Observers, provided no conflict of interest exists.</p>

Templates for Attachments A, D and E, mentioned in the above table can be downloaded from MDFA's website at: <http://www.mdfoundation.com.au>